Ray Case Papers Released to Press

By Paul Valentine
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Justice Department, prodded by writer and researcher Harold Weisberg, has reversed its position and agreed to make available the record of James Earl Ray's 1968 extradition proceeding from England in the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Justice officials released the 195-page packet of affidavits, photographs and various government documents to reporters yeaterday.

Weisberg filed a civil suit under the Freedom of Information Act last March 11, asking for a court order compelling the Justice Department to give him access to the records.

Up to that time, Justice had contended the records, as "investigative files," were exempt from the information act and could be withheld at the Department's discretion.

However, on May 6, while Weisberg's court action was still pending, Attorney General John N. Mitchell agreed to grant access.

Weisberg and his attorney, Bernard Fensterwald (who is also Ray's most recently acquired lawyer) examined the voluminous records at the Justice Department last month. Justice officials subsequently prepared additional copies for inquiring reporters and made them available yesterday.

Ray, 42, a convicted holdup man and prison escapee, was arrested in London, England, on June 8, 1968, after a two-month international search. King, the civil rights leader, was felled by a single bullet in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. His murder triggered riots in more than 100 American cities.

After an elaborate extradition hearing, Ray was returned to Memphis, and on March 10, 1969, he pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He is now seeking a re-opening of the case and a full trial, claiming his previous attorney, Percy Foreman, coerced him into pleading guilty. A hearing is expected this summer.

The extradition record made available yesterday contains numerous FBI affidavits claiming to link Ray to the King murder through fingerprint, handwriting, ballistic and other evidence.

Weisberg, who wrote "Whitewash," a book challenging the lone-assassin conclusion of the Warren Commission in the 1963 murder of President John F. Kennedy, has also questioned official findings in the King case.

Yugoslav Leader To Meet Kosygi

Reuters

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